

## Diplomatic Synergy: Pakistan and Russia in the Modern Era



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**Abstract:** *This article explores the evolving diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Russia in contemporary times. It delves into the strategic cooperative efforts undertaken by both nations to foster regional stability and address common geopolitical challenges. The article examines the historical contexts, geopolitical factors and shared interests that have facilitated this diplomatic synergy. It also highlights the growing economic, military and political cooperation between Pakistan and Russia, illustrating the significance of their evolving partnership in shaping the dynamics of international relations in the modern era.*

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Russia, Convergence of Interests, Diplomatic Ties, Security Cooperation, Economic Links, SCO

### Introduction

In May 1948, Pakistan and Russia established official ties. However, relationships do occasionally evolve as a result of numerous ups and downs. The more than 40 years of connections between Pakistan and the USSR are closely intertwined with the Russian Federation, which became the USSR's successor state after it disintegrated in December 1991. In the past, these partnerships weren't healthy. In the context of the Cold War, Pakistan was perceived by the Soviets as having US-sponsored military projects and ties with China. At the time, Pakistan was concerned about the USSR's tight relations with India. The Russian army's engagement in Afghanistan caused serious damage to

relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. The presence of the Russian military in Afghanistan was seen as a threat to Pakistan's defence. The Soviet Union conditioned all of Pakistan's diplomatic relations on its willingness to make concessions about its approach to Afghanistan. The dissolution of the Soviet Union offered Pakistan and Russia a fresh start, which both countries seized. After that, cooperative conversations between Pakistan and the Russian Federation were raised (Khan, [2021](#)).

It was Pakistan's first official visit to the Russian Federation after years of abuse by past administrations. It played a major role in ushering in a new era in the nation's relations with Russia. Since then, the two parties have

extended their travel exchanges, including trips provided by the then-deputy president (December 1991). Pakistan's foreign minister (April 1993), interior minister (April 1994), first vice foreign secretary (May 1994), and secretary of global relations (September 1992) were all appointed in July 1994. Along with other areas of cooperation, these tours covered a wide range of international challenges, including cooperative efforts in the domains of defensive systems, satellite communications, and peaceful nuclear energy. Russia's previous foreign policy was significantly altered by these trade visits, which demonstrated its desire to strengthen its relationship with Pakistan (Kurita, [2019](#)).

### **History of Pak-Russia Relations**

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During the early years of its existence (1947-1953), Pakistan declared non-alignment, demonstrating that the nation's vision was to focus on cooperation, peace, and friendship towards every state in the world. However, Pakistan's neutral foreign policy stance was short-lived, as the nation quickly entered the "era of alliances." Pakistan was desperately trying to ward off many security threats as a result of the many challenges the country was facing due to its social, political, and economic crises. The primary sources of these dangers were Afghanistan and India (Khan, [2021](#)).

### **Start of diplomatic relations with Russia**

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The first Indo-Pak conflict had already broken out in 1948. The two countries were engaged in a continuous war over the distribution of assets, the creation of princely states, and the sharing of river flows. Afghanistan too started acting hostilely after Pakistan gained its independence, going so far as to try and stop Pakistan from joining the UN. It rejected acknowledging the Durand Line as the two states' official boundary and attempted to revive the Pakhtoonistan Movement in Pakistan's western provinces (Kaura, [2018](#)).

Pakistan's military and economy were not robust enough to counter these threats on their own. Pakistan was invited to join the USSR and

the US as a reward for their partnership during the Cold War. Due to the overwhelming threats to Pakistan's national security, the authorities said that there are three options:

- I. To remain neutral
- II. To ally with the US block
- III. To join the Soviet block

### **Alliance with America**

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Pakistan chose option number three because of the security conditions it faced. What made Pakistan choose option 3 above the other options? Pakistan's answer to this was to "balance the threat" to its national security that its borders to the east and west continuously posed. Pakistan's elite was influenced by the West, the country decided to join the Western Bloc in order to gain access to major military technology, economic assistance, and defence funding. Pakistan also chose to join the bloc because it shared more ideological similarities with the US than the Soviet Union (Craig, [2015](#)).

Pakistan and the USSR have had strained relations ever since Pakistan gained its independence in 1947. These connections deteriorated in the early 1950s when Pakistan chose to join the Western bloc and signed its first defence deal with the US on May 9, 1954. When Pakistan joined the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in January 1955, the circumstances were extremely challenging. SEATO was established primarily to fight communism, which meant fighting the Soviet Union since the Soviet Union was the driving force behind the global communist revolution. Pakistan's foreign policy decision was fiercely disapproved by the Soviet Union. By signing SEATO, Pakistan had made clear where it stood in the Cold War and signalled the beginning of a long-lasting rivalry between Pakistan and the USSR. The era of globalization began in the 1920s. Following the collapse of the USSR, Pakistan and Russia's relations remained chilly (Khan, [n,d](#))

### **Assessment of Pak-Russia Bilateral Relations**

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Pakistan and Russia both desire amicable ties.

In reference to South Asia, Pakistan had praised Russia's impartiality and said that its bilateral relations with India had "impartial meaning." Although the Indians did not approve of the shift, India is actually worse off now. Following the end of the Cold War and the peace treaty between China and Russia, India lost its significance.

Friendships between Pakistan and the Soviet Union began to strengthen when the latter voiced regret for the Occupied Kashmir, nuclear non-proliferation, or Russia's delivery of weapons to Pakistan. The Soviet Union would have changed its stance and started supporting India unconditionally on all of these issues. Russia sincerely regretted the worsening of the human rights violations associated with the Hazratbal siege in October 1993 and urged all involved parties to cooperate in finding a peaceful end. India is quite alarmed by the aforementioned recent developments. In 1991, the Russian Federation refrained from opposing Pakistan's resolution in the UN General Assembly concerning the hydrogen area in South Asia for 17 years. However, it voted in favour of Pakistan's proposed proposal for the first time ever. In July 1994, the Prime Minister further irritated the Indians (Hussain, [2012](#)).

Pakistan and Russia also pleaded for peace and security to be developed in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Russia demanded that the turmoil be contained within the states of Central Asia. Along with pursuing tranquillity, Pakistan also wished to forge cordial ties with Afghanistan and the Central Asian States (Chaliha, [2021](#)).

Russia and Pakistan cooperated in the UN-sponsored talks on Tajikistan. Russia and Pakistan had been making use of their influence over the Tajik government. These talks were conducted in Kurdistan and Islamabad in 1994. The Russian President's invitation to visit Pakistan's highest level of government showed that he had carefully considered how to foster good relations with Pakistan (Sheikh, [2023](#)).

The governments of Pakistan and Russia paid a number of visits to each other in an effort

to bring about peace. Communication between the two countries has converged in large part because of the contemporary era of intellectual engagement. When the speaker of the Russian parliament visited Pakistan again in September 1998, he said that Russia was ready to arm Pakistan with heavy weapons. Furthermore, the speaker mentioned a few industries in Pakistan (Hussain & Fatima, [n.d.](#)).

The division of India into two sovereign nations, the establishment of a binary global order, and the start of the Cold War presented the newly formed states with the difficult choice of siding with the US or the USSR. India technically declared itself to be nonaligned, but it actively cooperated with the Soviet Union, and Pakistan, which was weak and experiencing economic difficulties, joined the security alliances spearheaded by the United States in order to gain military and economic advantages. Despite not having a significant issue that separates them, Pakistan and Russia have remained apart from one another. Generally speaking, there was a particular event that may have been used as a chance to establish solid foundations for their bilateral relations. In addition to Pakistan's initial foreign policy incompetence, the country turned down the Soviet Union's invitation and visited the United States. On the other hand, Pakistan has maintained well-balanced connections with China and the US; it would have made more sense to maintain both choices open and cultivate balanced relations with both the US and Russia. Furthermore, Pakistan's participation in Western security alliances was met with unwavering tolerance from both China and the Soviet Union, two communist nations. Pakistan was able to forge a solid alliance with China thanks to the communist bloc's forbearance, but its relations with the Soviet Union were unable to provide the necessary boost. In contemporary times, both countries have fantastic potential to deepen their relations. Russia is a powerful country in the region that is keen to increase the size of its influence. However, Russia's growing interest in Pakistan is a result of the country's proximity to Afghanistan and Central Asia,

growing anti-American sentiment, and its nuclear status (Khan, [n.d.](#)).

Relationships between Pakistan and Russia have grown under the weight of a deteriorating security environment and heated regional geopolitical positioning. Pakistan's threat sensitivity has been negatively impacted by India's increasing influence as an Asian power, Pakistan's growing distance from the US on Afghan matters, and Pakistan's strong relationship with the US. Pakistan's decision to engage with Russia and fortify its relations with China was prompted by the United States' acknowledgement of India's position as the dominant power in the region. Pakistan can enhance its economic and strategic connections with Russia and counter New Delhi's efforts to isolate Pakistan in the regional and global arenas by joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Chia'Haqi, [2021](#)).

On February 23, 2022, Imran Khan, the former prime minister of Pakistan, made his first official trip to Russia, reigniting bilateral relations between the two countries. President Putin and former Prime Minister Imran Khan discussed issues that were vital to their respective countries' economies. Meanwhile, Russian forces invaded Ukraine. Both the US and the UK sent a message to Imran Khan suggesting that he postpone the visit because of the situation in Ukraine, but he resisted their demands. In a nutshell, his fall from power was the consequence of this independent foreign policy move. Then, in a communiqué, Imran Khan stated that Pakistan has always condemned aggression against any state and underlined the necessity of using diplomacy and communication to address the Russia-Ukraine dispute. Still, Pakistan stayed silent during the UN general assembly meeting over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Pakistan's move suggests a change in its foreign policy (Hussain, [2012](#)).

Of course, the events of the past few months have brought a fresh perspective to Russian and Pakistani politics. Pakistan was, on the one hand, experiencing a period of domestic political stability. Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan was removed from

office in April following the passage of a no-confidence resolution by the national assembly. The former prime minister charged outright that the US was behind the effort to depose and defame him. The new government and Imran Khan's supporters continue to engage in civil conflict. However, it does not appear that the country's foreign policy strategy or its primary foreign policy interests—including the advancement of relations with Russia—have been significantly impacted by internal political developments, at least not yet. Despite pressure from the US, Pakistan has adopted a neutral stance on the situation in Ukraine. However, given that there would be no further communication between Russia and the West after February 24, keeping in touch with Asian nations—including Pakistan—has undoubtedly emerged as Russia's top strategic priority (Javed, [2022](#)).

### **Cooperation on Geo-Economic Ground**

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Due to a lack of mutual trust, Pakistan and Russia have always been unable to establish strong relations. However, as this article notes, both nations are striving to eradicate any lingering prejudice given their common goals of fostering ties. For example, Moscow is closely monitoring Pakistan's expanding strategic ties with China and is wary of the nation's close ties to the United States, which go back to the early stages of the Cold War. Concerns regarding Russia and India's strategic alliances are also shared by Islamabad. The past 10 years have seen significant changes in the international system. President Vladimir Putin's ascension in Russia and the US's deteriorating relations with both Pakistan and Russia have provided both countries a compelling rationale to reevaluate their bilateral connections. Russia is seeing fresh chances in South Asia while the US considers pulling out of Afghanistan and taking on Iran. Islamabad is currently searching for new allies in an effort to mend the relationship that has been steadily eroding with Washington. Simultaneously, Pakistan is facing new strains with its bitter adversary, India, which is presently led by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and has a Hindu nationalist government. As the focal point of China's Belt Road Initiative, the rapidly growing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is helping Pakistan in its efforts to shape its geo-economic importance (BRI). Russia-Pakistan ties are developing in response to recently formed geopolitical conditions in South Asia (Yousaf, [2014](#)).

### **Cooperation on Strategic Ground**

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For nearly ten years, there has been a state of conflict involving Pakistan's military services. The spillover from the Afghan War into Pakistan after 2001 has resulted in an extraordinary growth in domestic extremism and terrorist operations, especially in the western provinces and along the tribal borders with Afghanistan. Pakistan's army, civilian population, and already struggling industry have all suffered greatly. Even though Pakistan has obtained "alliance assistance funds" from the U. S. as payment for its involvement in the conflict, the decrease in energy supplies, general depletion from the ongoing war, and deterioration of ammunition and weapons have all negatively impacted Pakistan's military's ability to engage in a fight. These difficulties make it difficult for Pakistan to realize that its military needs to be modernized. Pakistan's structurally flawed, poor economy cannot support the country's security needs as requirements for national safety increase. Moreover, Pakistan's military demands have expanded plentifully, particularly given its ongoing necessity to balance against India, which has far significantly more resources. Pakistan wanted relationships with powerful nations during the Cold War to balance the strategic inequity with India. Since the 1950s, Islamabad has been able to keep a sufficient level of both quantitative and qualitative balance with India thanks to a military partnership with the US, but the distance between the two countries has remained increasing. As Pakistan's relationship with the West deteriorates, Pakistan has recently been looking to Beijing and Moscow to maintain a strategic position with India (Khan, [2021](#)).

Russia and Pakistan made fruitless attempts to mend fences in the middle of the 1990s. At the time of the US nuclear disarmament statute's Pressler amendment, which went into effect in 1990 and prohibited Pakistan from receiving financial or military assistance unless the president conducted routine verifications that Pakistan lacked nuclear weapons, Pakistan was subject to nuclear prohibitions. Modernization of Pakistan's army was desperately needed at the time. Pakistan believed that after utilizing it for American Cold War goals, the US had left it as a partner. Additionally, this meant that Pakistan was left in the dark as to how the Afghan War would affect it. Also, Russia was suffering through a financial downturn and was recovering from the collapse of the Soviet Union at that time. Russia was therefore keen to export military hardware and defence supplies. However, Pakistan was unable to pay the rates that Russia was demanding and believed that individuals representing Moscow in the negotiations lacked confidence. In the 1990s, both nations underwent internal instability as they transitioned into new democracies. The "southern vector" of Russia may now be in danger as a result of the Taliban's ascent in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Chechen rebels took shelter in the lawless regions that extended from Central Asia to the tribal regions of Pakistan's western frontiers (Khan, [n.d.](#)).

### **Improvement in relations after September 2001**

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Following the terrorist events on September 11, 2001, Pakistan and the US strengthened their alliance. President Pervez Musharraf's Pakistan took the lead in a fresh battle in Afghanistan once more. However, Pakistan and India were once more on the verge of war after the terrorist attacks on the Indian parliament in New Delhi in December 2001. Russia, like the rest of the world, feared that the two nuclear powers would go to war. Following that, President Putin extended an offer to mediate the dispute between India and Pakistan; India rejected it, but Pakistan agreed. Although New

Delhi has come to detest foreign meddling in the region, India still views it as its own. Russia established friendly ties with Pakistan under Musharraf's rule (1999–2008) and generally backed the US-led campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan (Sheikh, [2023](#)).

The Hyde Act of the 2008-enacted nuclear agreement between America and India came to fulfilment at the same time as President Musharraf's military government ended and Pakistan returned to a democratic republic. An exception was made for India to engage in civil nuclear commerce by the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) as a result, following a difficult and drawn-out process that led to US policy. As a result of India's nuclear exemption, Russia gained access to new markets in South Asia, and Russia used the chance to promote nuclear power projects to India. In comparison to other nations competing for India's nuclear market, Russia has a long background in military collaboration and security exports to India, giving it more familiarity with the country's tight bureaucratic system and work culture. The nuclear agreement also released India's national nuclear capability for military use, permitted India to maintain its nuclear weapons development, and imposed no obligations on India about the objectives of the disarmament pact. On the contrary, Pakistan experienced international condemnation due to the A. Q. Khan nuclear proliferation program, which collapsed in 2004 and has since persisted. United States policy and its consequences made the Pakistanis feel deceived and isolated, so they contacted Russia and China. Naturally, both parties wanted to take advantage of the rift between the US and Pakistan (Kurita, [2019](#)).

The Obama administration's South Asia policy (2009–2016), which focused on fostering closer ties with India and was labelled the "lynchpin" of the American shift to the Asia-Pacific region, was another factor contributing to the breach between America and Pakistan. Pakistan's importance was reduced because of its involvement in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and worries about nuclear security. Pakistan was providing the Afghan

Taliban, whom US troops were attacking, with support and a safe haven, therefore from the US's point of view, it was running with the hare and working both corners with the hounds. Additionally, while the US was attempting to restrain China, Islamabad was aiding China's entrance to Pakistan's shoreline. From Pakistan's point of view, Washington was downplaying Pakistani efforts and the indirect harm it was suffering as a result of the upheaval in Afghanistan while simultaneously soliciting its support and cooperation in the American battle there. Even worse, from Pakistan's perspective, the U.S. was giving India the strategic space that it was gaining through its strategic relationship with Pakistan, allowing New Delhi to exploit Afghan territory for its proxy conflict against Pakistani objectives (Khalid, [2021](#)).

In the 1960s, America and Pakistan were the "most aligned partners," and by the 1990s, they were the "most authorized allies," but over time, they drifted away as their strategic goals were more frequently at odds than congruent. When Russia and China became aware of the schisms, they both started to take precautions in case US involvement in the region had unpredictable results. To safeguard its objectives, Russia entered Afghanistan covertly and is still in touch with some Afghan Taliban groups (Qingyan, [2021](#)).

### **Development in relations since 2010**

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While tensions between Pakistan and the US escalated, relations between Pakistan and Russia began to significantly improve in 2010. This was evidenced by high-level visits, weapons sales, and growing collaboration. In November 2014, during Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shigu's visit, Pakistan and Russia inked an agreement on defence cooperation. A month earlier, in December 2015, Russia and Pakistan carried out their first combined counternarcotics drill. After Pakistan's army chief, Raheel Sharif, visited Moscow in the summer of 2015, Russia and Pakistan came to an agreement to buy Mi-35M Hind-E assault helicopters, which was completed three months later. Pakistan is

moving forward in its relations with Russia but at the same time, its military ties with America are going to deteriorate (Kaura, [2018](#)).

### **The emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an opportunity for Pakistan to develop its relations with Russia and China. Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017.

### **Pak-Russia relations after 2018**

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The military relationship between Pakistan and Russia is noteworthy in 2018. General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the head of Pakistan's army, visited Russia in April 2018 and the two nations established a Joint Military Commission. In addition, both nations' national security advisors convened in Moscow the same month to talk about nuclear and strategic concerns. In February 2019, there was another confrontation in Kashmir between India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan's air forces exchanged gunfire following a suicide strike against an Indian army convoy in Pulwama, Indian-administrated Kashmir. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) shot down an Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft, a Russian-built MIG-21, during the ensuing air war, and apprehended the pilot. After Pakistan made a peace gesture by returning the captive pilot, the tension subsided. China and Russia refused India's request to discuss the Pulwama incident at the SCO summit and proposed resolving it directly. Pakistan interpreted this development as evidence of improving ties between Russia and Pakistan because Russia chose not to press the matter. After 2018 Pakistan and Russia relations improved. Both countries tried to cooperate in every aspect of life (Khan, 2021).

### **Present time relations**

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Recently Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Putin in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization negotiated with each other for diplomatic relations and cooperation in the supply of oil, gas and other resources (Qingyan, [2021](#)).

### **Russia as a significant ally of Pakistan**

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#### **Energy Factor:**

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Russia, which is the top supplier of natural gas and second in terms of exports of oil, is frequently known as a "power giant" Russia must discover fresh markets for its renewable energy goods, just like every other nation that produces natural gas and petroleum. Pakistan, which is currently establishing its position as a major consumer, is experiencing a gas scarcity. Pakistan can never get gas from America but can get it from Russia because Russia is a greater supplier of natural gas and oil. It appears that Pakistan is experiencing a daily gas shortfall of 1.5 billion cubic feet, and by 2025, that shortage is predicted to triple. The groundwork for their future cooperation was formed when Russia and Pakistan signed a "shareholders' agreement" in July 2021, which called for the construction of a US\$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline in Pakistan. Therefore, Russia turns out to be more advantageous for Pakistan than the USA (Sheikh, [2023](#)).

#### **Security Factor:**

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Russia's attempts to build a durable defence system, especially in cooperation with neighbouring governments, demonstrate the strategic importance of adopting a "unified stand" to protect common national interests. Given the ongoing disagreement between Russia and NATO over Ukraine, it is not impossible to rule out the prospect of a small-scale battle. An additional analysis of previous conflicts shows that a regional strategic reaction prevents foreign military alliances from interfering hence preventing a wider regional conflict. Two of the most crucial tools for maintaining stability are the power balance and the defence of national interests, both of which Russia has managed to achieve during the past 20 years. Establishing long-lasting and extensive strategic ties with Moscow is essential for Pakistan. Pakistan has had multiple safety problems and conflicts since gaining its autonomy in 1947, yet it has remained an important player in finding

solutions. For many years, Pakistan has had numerous chances to connect its regional goals with those of powerful nations like China and Russia because Russia is proving a better ally for Pakistan instead of the USA (Javed, [2022](#)).

### **Economic Factor**

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Pakistan's neighbour is seeking new allies as the United States strengthens its relations with India. In Russia, they believe they have discovered one; this new alliance has the potential to ultimately change long-standing relationships in South Asia. The Pakistani army and political authorities have made overtures to Moscow in the last few weeks to thaw relations that have been icy since the Cold War. Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defence minister, went to Pakistan in November and signed a defence assistance pact with Pakistani military leaders. Pakistan now intends to complete agreements to purchase 30 Russian Mi-35 helicopters and better integrate operations to combat terrorism and drugs. Pakistan also requests help from Moscow to stabilize ongoing problems with energy (Craig, [2015](#)).

### **Conclusion**

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To conclude, the evolving partnership between Pakistan and Russia reflects the changing dynamics of global politics and highlights the multifaceted benefits and implications for both Pakistan and Russia in the contemporary era. The diplomatic synergy between Pakistan and Russia is primarily driven by shared interests in regional stability,

economic cooperation and counter-terrorism efforts. The two countries have recognized the significance of regional connectivity, particularly through projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Russia's interest in the development of a North-South corridor. These initiatives not only foster economic development but also strengthen the geopolitical positioning of both nations. Moreover, military cooperation between Pakistan and Russia has seen a significant uptick, with arms deals, joint exercises and defence collaborations. This synergy is not only beneficial for both countries but also contributes to a more balanced distribution of power in the region. In the context of international diplomacy, the alignment of Pakistan and Russia is altering the regional and global power balance. It challenges the traditional dominance of Western powers in shaping global politics and offers an alternative perspective on addressing complex geopolitical issues. In summary, the diplomatic synergy between Pakistan and Russia is a testament to the evolving nature of international relations in the modern era. Their partnership is not without challenges and complexities but it holds the potential to create a more balanced, multi-polar world order. As these two nations continue to work together on economic, military and political fronts, their collaboration will undoubtedly influence the trajectory of international diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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